

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claim 1 - 4. (canceled)

5. (currently amended): A method for producing fermented milk, which comprises reducing ~~a-the~~ concentration of dissolved oxygen in a mix of raw materials for fermented milk at the start of fermentation to 5 ppm or less by substituting the dissolved oxygen with an inert gas; and carrying out fermentation at a fermentation temperature of from 30°C to 37°C.

6. (currently amended): The method for producing fermented milk according to claim 5, wherein the period of carrying out fermentation is ~~shortened~~shorter than a period of carrying out fermentation without reducing the concentration of dissolved oxygen at the fermentation temperature.

7. (canceled)

8. (Previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 5.

9. (Previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 6.

10. (Previously presented): A fermented milk, which has a penetration angle of 31° or less and a hardness of 40 g or more, wherein the hardness is an elasticity until break of the penetration angle curve obtained by a measurement of the penetration angle of a yogurt knife with a weight of 100 g using a neocurd meter, and the penetration angle is an indicator of smoothness.

11. (Previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 5, which has a penetration angle of 31° or less and a hardness of 40 g or more, wherein the hardness is an elasticity until break of the penetration angle curve obtained by a measurement of the penetration angle of a yogurt knife with a weight of 100 g using a neocurd meter, and the penetration angle is an indicator of smoothness.

12. (Previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 6, which has a penetration angle of 31° or less and a hardness of 40 g or more, wherein the hardness is an elasticity until break of the penetration angle curve obtained by a measurement of the penetration angle of a yogurt knife with a weight of 100 g using a neocurd meter, and the penetration angle is an indicator of smoothness.

13. (Previously presented): The method according to claim 5, wherein the reduced concentration of dissolved oxygen is maintained during fermentation.